UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.5/1996/2
3 May 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
Special session of 1996
21-31 May 1996
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

REVIEW OF THE FUNCTIONING OF THE COMMISSION

The future role of the Commission for Social Development

Report of the Secretary-General

CONTENTS

	Paragraphs	Page
INTRODUCTION	1 - 7	3
THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE COMMISSION	8 - 54	5
A. Mandate, membership and frequency of sessions	8 - 18	5
B. Methods of work	19 - 40	7
C. Structure of the agenda and multi-year programme of work	41 - 54	11
Annex. OVERVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION: PAST AND PRESENT		
A. Mandate and terms of reference	1 - 2	16
B. Size, membership and frequency of meetings	3 - 8	16
C. Scope of the work and structure of the agenda	9 - 13	17

* E/CN.5/1996/1.

96-10347 (E) 090596 100596

/...

CONTENTS (continued)

	Paragraphs	Page
D. Past experience in adapting to changing needs	14 - 34	18
1. Topics before the Commission	14 - 24	18
2. Functions and methods of work of the Commission	25 - 34	21
E. Current methods of work	35 - 53	23
1. Agenda	37 - 41	24
2. Inter-sessional expert groups	42 - 46	25
3. In-session working groups	47	26
4. Documentation	48 - 49	26
5. Reporting and guidance provided by the Commission	50 - 52	26
6. Role of the Secretariat	53	27

INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission for Social Development has been in existence from the very inception of the United Nations, advising the Economic and Social Council and Governments on a wide range of social policy issues and on the social perspective of development. Functioning under a broad mandate, the Commission for Social Development, formerly the Social Commission, has met at various intervals and at different locations during its 50 years of existence, with a membership that has varied in size and geographical composition. It has adapted its agenda and its methods of work periodically to enable it to provide, in changing circumstances, relevant expert advice to the Council, to multilateral funds and programmes supporting operational activities in the social field, and to Governments seeking technical guidance in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of national policy.

2. In chapter V of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, 1/ concerned with follow-up arrangements to the Summit, it is stated that the Economic and Social Council should be invited to review the mandate, agenda and composition of the Commission for Social Development, including considerations of the strengthening of the Commission, taking into account the need for synergy with other relevant commissions and conference follow-up (para. 95 (f)).

3. At its thirty-fourth session, which was held one month after the convening of the Summit, the Commission for Social Development considered as its priority subject the World Summit for Social Development. It adopted resolution 34/4 on the follow-up of the Summit, 2/ in the annex to which, inter alia, it referred to its central role in the follow-up of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, and recognized that it should be in a position to increase the value of its contributions to international cooperation and social development. To this end, the Commission proposed opening its debates to experts and the main actors of civil society in the field of social development; it also indicated that the Economic and Social Council should review the Commission's mandate, agenda and composition; and proposed a new structure for its agenda in order to reflect, at subsequent sessions, the changing global priorities of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action.

4. In its resolution 1995/60, the Economic and Social Council decided that the Commission for Social Development, as a functional commission of the Council, in promoting the integrated treatment of social development issues in the United Nations system, should review, on a periodic basis, issues related to the follow-up and implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, in a manner consistent with the functions and contributions of other relevant organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, and that, to that end, the Commission should:

(a) Improve international understanding of social development, including through exchanges of information and experiences, and through discussions on emerging issues;

(b) Make recommendations regarding social development to the Economic and Social Council;

(c) Elaborate practical measures aimed at furthering the recommendations of the World Summit for Social Development.

5. The General Assembly, in its resolution 50/161, decided that a revitalized Commission for Social Development, together with the Council and the Assembly itself, should constitute a three-tiered intergovernmental process in the follow-up to the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. It decided also to hold a special session in the year 2000 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit and to consider further actions and initiatives. It called upon the Commission, as a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council with the primary responsibility for the follow-up to and review of the implementation of the Summit, to develop a multi-year programme of work to the year 2000, selecting specific themes and addressing them from an interrelated and integrated perspective, in a manner consistent with the functions and contributions of other relevant organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, and to present its recommendations to the Council, which should ensure harmonization between such a multi-year programme of work and those of other relevant functional commissions of the Council.

6. The Assembly also endorsed Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/60, and called upon the Commission, when developing its multi-year programme of work for the follow-up to the Summit:

(a) To adapt its mandate in order to ensure an integrated approach to social development;

(b) To integrate the current sectoral issues on its agenda in the multi-year programme;

(c) To review and update its methods of work and to make recommendations to ensure an effective follow-up to the Summit;

(d) To establish the practice of inviting experts to contribute to its work;

(e) To consider integrating into its work high-level representatives on social development issues and policies.

The Assembly requested the Commission to consider, in view of the scope of its work, the composition of the membership of the Commission and the frequency of its sessions and to make recommendations thereon to the Economic and Social Council. It also requested the Commission to establish the practice of involving the relevant actors of civil society in the field of social development to contribute to its work.

7. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to present proposals to the Commission for Social Development and the Economic and Social Council for consideration at their next sessions, taking into account the experience gained

in other functional commissions, the Council and the International Labour Organization and at the Summit. The present report has been prepared in response to that request. It sets out options and possibilities for reform, grouped under a number of headings, dealing, respectively, with its mandate, membership and frequency of meetings, its methods of work and its agenda and multi-year programme of work. The annex to the present report provides an overview of the work of the Commission in the past and of its current concerns and methods of work.

THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE COMMISSION

A. Mandate, membership and frequency of sessions

1. Mandate

8. The range of issues considered by the Commission is wide and its mandate, as is evident from the annex, is very broad. Therefore no change in the Commission's formal mandate is required for it to assume the responsibilities envisaged for it by the Economic and Social Council in resolution 1995/60 and by the General Assembly in resolution 50/161, regarding the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development. At the same time, it would be helpful for the Commission's role in the follow-up to be explicitly reaffirmed, by a resolution or decision of the Economic and Social Council, or in some other appropriate manner, perhaps in connection with a formal endorsement by the Council of the Commission's multi-year programme of work to be elaborated at its present session. Analogous resolutions and decisions were adopted by the Commission on Population and Development and the Commission on the Status of Women in respect of the follow-up of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995).

9. A further consideration is that the Council, in its resolution 1995/60, left open the precise manner in which the Commission would assist the Council in the intergovernmental review of the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action so as to ensure an integrated approach to social development.

10. Taking into account recent intergovernmental decisions on an integrated follow-up to major international conferences and the role of the Council in that respect, the Commission's main responsibility in the Copenhagen follow-up could be to assist the Council in organizing and coordinating substantive inputs from different entities of the United Nations system, as well as the contributions of other concerned functional commissions of the Council. As part of this effort, the Commission for Social Development could contribute specialized knowledge, organize contributions from other bodies of the United Nations in its traditional areas of competence, such as social integration, social policy and social welfare, and on the social dimension of other questions dealt with at the World Summit for Social Development, including poverty and productive employment. The Commission would bring together all relevant inputs and prepare a synthetic, coherent presentation for the Council's consideration, as the appropriate coordinating body.

11. *Points for decision:*

(a) The Commission may wish to consider the approach outlined in the previous paragraph to its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action as part of a coordinated follow-up to United Nations conferences.

(b) The Commission may also wish to consider how to combine these responsibilities with its traditional functions of monitoring the implementation of various international instruments, some pertaining to social or population groups, others to social policy and social welfare, family, poverty and other social issues.

2. Membership

12. Both the Commission and the Council have given consideration in recent years to the possibility of enlarging the membership of the Commission. No specific conclusion has emerged from those deliberations. The present membership of the Commission has remained at 32 since 1966. All Member States are free to participate in the work of the Commission. While only members may vote, the Commission has for the past two decades or more taken all substantive decisions by consensus, with members and non-members taking part; on only one occasion during that period was a formal vote taken: in respect of the election of persons to serve on the Board of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. Moreover, according to the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Council, all Council members may sponsor resolutions in the Commission, whether members of the Commission or not. The most important formal right reserved to members is eligibility for election to the Bureau.

13. For purposes of comparison it is noted that during the past few years the Council has agreed to increase the membership of several of its functional commissions. The membership of the Commission on the Status of Women was increased from 32 to 45 in 1989 (Council resolution 1989/45); of the Commission on Human Rights, from 43 to 53 in 1990 (Council resolution 1990/48); and of the Commission on Population and Development, from 27 to 47 in 1995 (Council decision 1995/320).

14. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to consider the question of the size of membership of the Commission.

3. Frequency and duration of sessions

15. Both the Commission and the Council have considered the frequency of the sessions of the Commission, now held every two years, without taking a formal position on the matter. The other functional commissions of the Council that are mandated to follow up the implementation of major United Nations conferences meet annually. Such annual meetings help to maintain the momentum generated by

those conferences. The General Assembly will also consider the implementation of the Summit on a regular basis.

16. *Point for decision:*

Bearing in mind the role envisaged by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly for the Commission in the follow-up of the World Summit for Social Development and the need for the Commission to contribute effectively to the monitoring of the implementation, follow-up and assessment of the outcome of the Summit, the Commission may consider recommending to the Council that it meet on an annual basis.

17. Regarding the duration of sessions, the present practice is to schedule eight working days per session. Sessions are scheduled to begin on either a Monday or a Wednesday and to end on the Wednesday or Friday of the following week. It would be useful to have a schedule that makes it possible to convene a meeting of the outgoing Bureau, or extended Bureau, just prior to the opening of the session, to discuss organizational matters and have an informal exchange of views on the conduct of the forthcoming session.

18. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to recommend a fixed schedule for future meetings, beginning on a Wednesday and ending on the Friday of the following week; Commission sessions would normally take place during February.

B. Methods of work

1. Role of the Bureau

19. In accordance with the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, the Chairman and other officers of the Commission are elected at the beginning of the session and serve until a new Bureau is elected at the next session. This arrangement ensures a measure of continuity from one session to another.

20. In respect of some commissions, for example the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Sustainable Development, it has been the practice to convene meetings of the Bureau between sessions to consider organizational matters and other issues relating to the preparation and the agenda of forthcoming sessions.

21. Regarding the practice of the Commission for Social Development in recent years, members of the Bureau have been entrusted with the responsibility of chairing ad hoc or informal working groups, normally meeting during the session. No meetings of the Bureau have been convened between the biennial sessions of the Commission.

22. *Point for decision:*

Consideration should be given to convening inter-sessional meetings of the Bureau to help prepare for the formal meetings of the Commission and to provide an opportunity for exchanging information between delegations and the Secretariat on the agenda and main themes of the session, as well as on the state of preparation of documentation and other matters of mutual concern, in particular the organization of work and timetable of the next session.

2. Organization of work and timetable

23. At present, the Secretariat prepares a draft provisional programme of work for the Commission, proposing a timetable for the consideration of the different items on the agenda. The Commission finalizes the programme of work at the opening meeting of each session.

24. Experience suggests that the participation of officials with substantive responsibility in government for specific issues before the Commission is particularly important. Such participation is contingent, to a significant extent, on the quality and timeliness of the preparations for the Commission and timely decisions on the scheduling of the different items to be considered by it. Timely decisions on the scheduling of in-session working groups, panels and other activities are especially important. In this connection, advance information on the timetable may facilitate participation.

25. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to review the manner in which it decides how to organize its work and decide on its timetable, to give sufficient time for its members, observers and other participants to prepare for the session. One option would be for the Commission to entrust the Bureau, or an expanded Bureau, with the arrangements to be made, well in advance of each session, after appropriate consultations with the membership, subject to formal approval at the beginning of each session.

3. Role of representatives of the United Nations system

26. Specialized agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, including the regional commissions, are entitled to be represented at meetings of the Commission and to participate in its deliberations with respect to items of concern to them; they are also eligible to submit proposals regarding such items. Based on recent experience from the preparatory process for major international conferences, including the World Summit for Social Development, the Commission's work would be enriched by being able to draw fully on the expertise of the United Nations system at both plenary and working group meetings.

27. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to consider ways in which to ensure appropriate representation of the United Nations system and to encourage more intensive interaction between the Commission and representatives of the entities of the United Nations system on substantive matters. One possibility would be to organize formal panel sessions with invited representatives or to hold "hearings" on specific issues on which the Commission wishes to make recommendations. The Commission could also consider eliciting written submissions on specific topics in advance of its session and invite representatives of the entities of the United Nations system to participate, in an advisory capacity, in working groups on specific topics.

4. Role of NGO representatives and outside experts

28. The Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development stresses the important role, in partnership with government and the private sector, of organizations of civil society in policy discussions and in the implementation of the measures adopted by the Summit. At its thirty-fourth session, the Commission accordingly proposed opening its debates to experts and the main actors of civil society in the field of social development. This approach is also reflected in Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/60 and General Assembly resolution 50/161.

29. Non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council (category I or II) may attend, as observers, public meetings of the Commission, and the Commission may consult them directly or through committees established for that purpose. They have the right to have brief papers circulated during the session, through the Secretariat. Organizations on the Roster may also have representatives present at meetings and may also be heard at the request of the Commission. In accordance with Council decision 1996/208, NGOs accredited to the Summit but not having consultative status with the Economic and Social Council have been invited to participate as observers, on an exceptional basis, in the present session of the Commission.

30. The active participation of persons from and representing major groups of civil society would clearly add a valuable new dimension to the work of the Commission. The Commission may wish to consider, in the context of deciding on its long-term work programme, the specific roles and contributions of such participants in order to enhance the quality of its work and outputs. Consideration needs to be given also to the method of selecting such participants and the financial implications of inviting their participation.

31. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to consider ways to enhance the contribution of NGOs and other actors of civil society to its work. The Commission could, for example, encourage the formation of NGO caucuses on subjects of special interest to the Commission and hear joint statements or presentations or receive written suggestions from them. The Commission could also consider inviting NGO representatives and other social actors to participate in

working groups, in order to make their expertise on specific topics available in the elaboration of texts or guidelines for subsequent submission to the Commission.

32. Several functional commissions have recently experimented with new forms of interaction between members and outside experts in the context of formal sessions or in the form of side-events. The Commission on Sustainable Development and the Commission on the Status of Women are among commissions that have experimented along these lines. The initial reaction of members has generally been positive.

33. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may consider the possibility of a dialogue with a panel of experts on the themes selected for each session. The panels could be chosen through consultations between the Secretariat and the Bureau of the Commission.

5. Expert groups and inter-sessional working groups

34. Inter-sessional expert meetings have provided a useful mechanism for ensuring in-depth preparation of priority topics for debate and action at the Commission, especially when it held its sessions only once every two years. Inter-sessional working groups have been convened on occasion under the auspices of the Commission for the purpose of preparing major events and texts or guidelines requiring extensive consultations and negotiations. If the Commission met annually, a more selective use of inter-sessional meetings might be appropriate.

35. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to consider the possibility of inter-sessional meetings as and when a specific need arises for an intensive negotiating process or for securing expert advice.

6. In-session working groups and informal consultations

36. The Commission has made extensive use of in-session ad hoc, open-ended working groups to expedite its substantive work. It has also resorted to informal consultations during its sessions to resolve points at issue in draft resolutions, to reconcile different texts and to consolidate draft texts and requests for documentation.

37. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to review its practice concerning in-session working groups and agree on criteria for convening such groups to deal only with priority questions. Informal consultations have proved very helpful in the past and the Commission may wish to continue to allocate time in its work schedule for this purpose.

7. Commission outputs: advice, decisions and resolutions

38. At recent sessions, the Commission has resorted with greater frequency to the elaboration of texts containing the Commission's analysis and recommendations on substantive issues, subsequently annexed to a resolution of the Commission, or a draft resolution for action by the Council, or, through the Council, the General Assembly. Recommendations on the agenda and core issues of the World Summit for Social Development, for example, were transmitted to the Council and the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development in this format.

39. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to expand this practice whenever possible to make its substantive recommendations.

8. Relationship with other functional commissions

40. In considering its agenda and multi-year programme of work, the Commission is requested by the General Assembly in resolution 50/161, to ensure harmonization between such a multi-year programme and those of other relevant functional commissions of the Council. The suggestions put forward below were drawn up bearing in mind the Assembly's request. The Secretariat will also continue to bring to the attention of the Commission actions and decisions relevant to its work taken by other functional commissions, including, for its special session, decisions regarding poverty made by the Commission on the Status of Women at its fortieth session. The Commission may wish, in turn, to consider how it could bring to the attention of other functional commissions its decisions and recommendations.

C. Structure of the agenda and multi-year programme of work

41. In its resolution 50/161, the General Assembly called upon all relevant organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to be involved in the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, and reaffirmed that the follow-up to the Summit would be undertaken on the basis of an integrated approach to social development and within the framework of a coordinated follow-up to and implementation of the results of the major international conferences in the economic, social and related fields. It also decided that the intergovernmental process for follow-up would comprise the General Assembly, through its role in policy formulation, the Economic and Social Council, through its role in overall guidance and coordination, in accordance with their respective roles under the Charter of the United Nations and with Assembly resolution 48/162, and a revitalized Commission for Social Development.

42. At its thirty-fourth session, in 1995, the Commission approved the provisional agenda for its thirty-fifth session, in 1997, which was subsequently endorsed by the Economic and Social Council. The provisional agenda for the thirty-fifth session is before the Commission in document E/CN.5/1996/L.2. At its present (special) session, the Commission is called upon to develop a

multi-year programme of work to the year 2000, selecting specific themes and addressing them from an interrelated and integrated perspective. In order to do so, the Commission may also wish to consider anew the structure of the agenda for its future sessions.

1. Structure of the agenda

43. As currently proposed, the Commission's agenda in future will contain two main items: (a) follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development; and (b) monitoring of other international plans and programmes of action. These two items would appear to be both comprehensive and flexible enough to enable the Commission to fulfil its major role in the follow-up to the Summit, to allow it to contribute to the coordinated follow-up to the other major international conferences in the economic and social fields, and to enable it to maintain its ongoing activities regarding specific social groups. The amount of time devoted by the Commission to any particular issue at any given session would be determined by the Commission itself, or its Bureau during inter-sessional periods, and reflected in the organization of work for that session.

44. The agenda item on follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development currently contains four sub-items: (a) implications of decisions and resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1995 and the General Assembly at its fiftieth session that relate to the Commission for Social Development; (b) priority subjects encompassing the core issues, commitments and related issues of the Summit; (c) review of the progress made in the implementation and follow-up of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, including reports of relevant bodies of the United Nations system, taking into account relevant decisions and resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council; and (d) review of the world social situation.

45. It may be desirable to re-configure these four sub-items to make two. The first would be a combination of the review of the progress made in the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and the review of the world social situation. Such a combined review, undertaken in discussions in plenary, could include reports of relevant bodies of the United Nations system, as well as of relevant programmes, specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions, and it might also include periodic national reports, outlining successes, problems and obstacles, as suggested in paragraph 83 (j) of the Programme of Action. Discussions would benefit from the information provided in the Report on the World Social Situation and the related interim report. Progress achieved in the area of an enabling environment for social development might also be considered on a regular basis.

46. The second sub-item would be the priority subjects encompassing the core issues, commitments and related issues of the Summit. Discussions could be undertaken both in plenary and in working groups. Discussions in plenary could focus on issues of policy and substantive developments, in effect moving the international consideration of these issues forward from Copenhagen. Working groups could focus on technical aspects of the same priority subject, providing

an opportunity to exchange experiences, and to strengthen partnerships among Governments, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations in order to further develop and operationalize the suggestions contained in the relevant sections of the Programme of Action.

47. The sub-item on the implications of decisions and resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly might best be taken up during discussions under the item on monitoring of other international plans and programmes of action. This item would then contain the Commission's ongoing work regarding specific social groups and allow it to contribute its views to discussions undertaken by other functional commissions, by the Economic and Social Council, particularly at its coordination and high-level segments, and by the General Assembly. The Commission's discussions could be held either in plenary or in working groups, at its discretion.

48. In accordance with various standing mandates or established practice, the Commission considers the following matters on a regular basis: (a) major issues and programme activities of the United Nations Secretariat and the regional commissions relating to social development and welfare and specific social groups - at each session (Commission resolution 30/2); 3/ (b) Quadrennial review of the International Plan of Action on Ageing (General Assembly resolution 37/51); (c) quinquennial review of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (when the review coincides with the year in which a Commission session is held) (General Assembly resolution 37/53); (d) proposed draft programme budget narrative for the biennium in question - at each session; (e) draft medium-term plan, or proposed revisions thereto - at each session, as relevant; (f) report of the Board of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development for the biennium - at each session; (g) nomination of members for election to the Board of UNRISD - at each session (Commission resolution 10 (XXV)). Topics (a), (b) and (c) above might best be considered in the future under the item on the monitoring of other international plans and programmes of action. Topics (d), (e), (f) and (g) might continue to be taken up under the item on other matters.

49. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to approve the following structure for the agenda of future sessions:

Agenda item I: Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Sub-item A: Progress made in implementing the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and review of the world social situation - discussion in plenary meetings

Sub-item B: Priority subject

1. Policy-level discussion in plenary meetings

2. Technical-level discussion in working group meetings

Agenda item II: Monitoring of other international plans and programmes of action

Sub-item A: Review of instruments pertaining to the situation of specific social groups (youth, older persons, disabled persons, the family)

Sub-item B: Contributions to discussions held by other intergovernmental bodies

2. Multi-year programme of work

50. The Commission would consider each of the sub-items of this proposed agenda at each of its sessions between 1997 and 2000. Issues for some of the sub-items, however, would be discussed on a rotating basis and not at every session. The precise pattern of rotation would depend on the decision regarding the frequency of sessions - whether annual or biennial. A basis for preparing a multi-year programme of work is suggested below. It takes into account the major tasks facing the Commission during the next several years, the major issues arising from the series of international conferences during the 1990s, and the precedents for establishing such multi-year programmes, and their substantive content, set by the Commission on Population and Development and the Commission on the Status of Women.

51. For agenda item I, the review of progress made in implementing the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and the review of the world social situation would take place at each Commission session. The priority subject would be different at each session, but it should always reflect the multisectoral nature of the World Summit for Social Development by combining aspects of the three core issues. Some possible themes for this purpose are as follows:

Strengthening partnerships among government, civil society and the private sector for social development;

A broader recognition and understanding of work, employment and sustainable livelihoods;

Enhanced social protection and reduced vulnerability;

The enabling environment for social development.

52. For agenda item II, the Commission might choose to monitor the instruments pertaining to one or two of the social groups at any one session, on a rotating basis. Under this item, in 1997, the Commission will consider the following:

Disability: report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on progress achieved in implementing the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities;

Ageing: fourth quadrennial review of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and preparations for the International Year of Older Persons (1999).

53. The themes for subsequent years for agenda item II could be drawn from the following:

Ageing: preparations for the International Year of Older Persons (1999);

The family: five years after the International Year of the Family;

The situation of youth: five years after the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

54. The multi-year programme of work of the Commission would also have to schedule discussion of the outcome of high-level meetings, where organized by regional commissions, to review progress towards implementation of the outcome of the Summit. The Commission would also have to schedule a discussion on its contribution to the review of the outcome of the Summit, which will be undertaken by the General Assembly in 2000. It would be expected to contribute its views to the high-level and the coordination segments of the Council depending on the themes chosen as part of the Council's coordinated review of the outcome of United Nations conferences. Similarly, it might make contributions to the other functional commissions when issues of relevance appear on their agendas. Finally, the Commission would consider issues assigned to it by the Assembly and the Council, as they deem appropriate.

Notes

1/ Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995 (A/CONF.166/9), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

2/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1995, Supplement No. 4 (E/1995/24), chap. I, sect. E.

3/ Ibid., 1987, Supplement No. 7 (E/1987/20), chap. I, sect. D.

Annex

OVERVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION: PAST AND PRESENT

A. Mandate and terms of reference

1. The Commission for Social Development was established by the Economic and Social Council in resolution 10 (II) of 21 June 1946. Following a comprehensive reappraisal of the role of the Commission in 1961 and again in 1966, the Council, in resolution 1139 (XLI) of 29 July 1966, renamed the Commission in order to clarify its role as a preparatory and advisory body of the Council in the whole range of social development policy.

2. The terms of reference of the Commission for Social Development, as they have traditionally existed, are to:

(a) Advise the Council on social policies of a general character and give particular attention to policies designed to promote social progress, to the establishment of social objectives and programme priorities and social research in areas affecting social and economic development;

(b) Advise the Council on practical measures that may be needed in the social field, including questions of social welfare, community development, urbanization, housing and social defence;

(c) Advise the Council on measures needed for the coordination of activities in the social field and for the recording and exchange of experience among Governments in the formulation and execution of social development policies;

(d) Advise the Council on such international agreements and conventions on any of these matters, as may be required, and on their execution;

(e) Report to the Council on the extent to which the recommendations of the United Nations in the field of social policy are being carried out;

(f) Advise the Council also on vital social problems in respect of which action or recommendations may be required either by the Council itself or by the General Assembly in accordance with General Assembly resolution 2035 (XX) of 7 December 1965.

B. Size, membership and frequency of meetings

3. The membership of the Commission was originally 18. Membership was increased on two occasions: to 21 by Council resolution 845 I (XXXII) of 3 August 1961, and to 32, its current membership, by Council resolution 1147 (XLI) of 4 August 1966. The term of office of the members of the Commission is four years.

4. The Commission formally consists of one representative from each of 32 States Members of the United Nations elected by the Council on the basis of equitable geographical distribution according to the following pattern: (a) eight members from African States; (b) six members from Asian States; (c) four members from Eastern European States; (d) six members from Latin American and Caribbean States; and (e) eight members from Western European and other States.

5. In accordance with section IV of Council resolution 1139 (XLI), the Member States elected to the Commission should nominate candidates who hold key positions in the planning or execution of national social development policies or other persons qualified to discuss the formulation of social policies in more than one sector of development. With a view to securing a balanced representation in the various fields covered by the Commission, the Secretary-General has in the past consulted with the Governments concerned before the representatives are finally nominated by those Governments and confirmed by the Council.

6. The Commission met twice in 1947, once in 1948, twice in 1949, annually from 1950 to 1953, biennially from 1955 to 1961, annually from 1962 to 1963, biennially from 1963 to 1965, annually from 1966 to 1971, and biennially from 1973 to 1995. The present session is the Commission's first special session.

7. From its beginnings in 1947 until its twenty-sixth session, in 1979, the Commission met at United Nations Headquarters in New York. Between the twenty-seventh session, in 1981, and the thirty-third session, in 1993, the Commission held its meetings at the Vienna International Centre. The thirty-fourth session of the Commission was again held at Headquarters, where it is expected that future sessions will also be held.

8. In recent years, each session of the Commission has met for a total of eight working days. The Commission has adopted the practice of dividing its time between discussions held in plenary meetings and ad hoc working groups established to discuss certain issues of particular interest in greater depth. At its most recent session (the thirty-fourth), the Commission established three working groups: a Working Group of the Whole to deal with the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development; an Open-ended Working Group on the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond; and a Working Group on Monitoring the Implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

C. Scope of the work and structure of the agenda

9. The workload of the Commission has increased steadily, especially since the late 1960s, with the growing emphasis within the United Nations on the social aspects of development, the attention given to specific social groups within society and the development process, and the need to ensure adequate monitoring of various international plans and programmes of action and follow-up to international events. The global events organized in the past 15 years, and their follow-up, have added significantly to the work of the Commission.

10. The agenda of the Commission, reflecting its broad terms of reference, is wide in scope. It has traditionally included items under which the Commission discusses social questions of a general character as well as more specific items of topical interest, which in recent years have generally been related to specific social groups. In the past, as interest focused on new specific areas of social concern, there was a corresponding increase in the number of separate agenda items or sub-items before the Commission. Following the adoption by the Economic and Social Council of resolution 1981/83, in which the Council, inter alia, instructed its subsidiary bodies to take urgent measures to streamline their agendas and programmes of work, the Commission adopted the practice of clustering various topics under a smaller number of separate agenda items.

11. Since the thirtieth session, in 1987, the Commission's agenda has contained three items under which substantive issues are discussed: (a) review of the world social situation; (b) monitoring of international plans and programmes of action; and (c) priority subject.

12. Following the World Summit for Social Development, the Commission, at its thirty-fourth session, proposed further changes in its agenda. The proposed new agenda, for the thirty-fifth session, in 1997, was endorsed by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1995 (Council decision 1995/248). The agenda groups the Commission's substantive work under two main items, namely, "Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development" and "Monitoring of other international plans and programmes of action" (see E/CN.5/1996/L.2).

13. Even as the Commission expanded its agenda, over the years various topics and issues related to social development, which were initially its concern, have been "spun off" to other forums. A few examples of issues that were originally the subject of discussion in the Commission are: child welfare (the original Declaration on the Rights of the Child was discussed in the Commission as early as 1948); housing and town and country planning, during which the Commission considered the reports of the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning; and crime prevention, criminal justice and the treatment of offenders, on which subject a Committee on Crime Prevention and Control was established, which eventually evolved into the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

D. Past experience in adapting to changing needs

1. Topics before the Commission

14. In the period prior to the establishment of the series of United Nations development decades, the Commission took action in each of the areas of its terms of reference. Acting upon General Assembly resolution 535 (VI) of 2 February 1952, in which the Assembly requested the Economic and Social Council to draw up a programme of practical action for the United Nations in the social field to be implemented in cooperation with the specialized agencies, the Commission developed a wide-ranging programme which included the matter of technical assistance to remedy social problems directly connected with economic development. The substantive topics that were included at one time or another on the Commission's agenda throughout this period were comprehensive:

background research basic to social policy and the collection and dissemination of information; health; housing and town and country planning; nutrition; education; labour; community organization and development; social security; social assistance and related measures concerned with income; family and child welfare; rehabilitation of the handicapped; social defence; training of social workers; migration and refugees; and emergency relief.

15. The Commission advised the Council on social questions of a general character by monitoring world social conditions. At its sixth session, in 1950, the Social Commission agreed that a trial international report on social conditions should be prepared, and at its session in 1952, the Commission considered the resultant preliminary report on the world social situation (E/CN.5/267), the first to describe comprehensively social conditions and the extent of social development in all parts of the world. The Report on the World Social Situation has continued to be prepared on a periodic basis by the Secretariat and submitted to the Commission for Social Development for discussion. The most recent report was submitted in 1993 and the next report is expected in 1997. Interim reports are also provided, so that the Commission can comment and provide guidance to the Secretariat during the preparation of the reports. The agenda sub-item on the review of the world social situation continues to figure prominently in the Commission's work.

16. As a result of its work in monitoring global social conditions, the Commission recognized the need for improved social statistics and information. At its tenth session, in 1955, the Commission considered the problem of international definition and measurement of standards and levels of living, and at its eleventh session, in 1957, it considered further work on information essential for social policy, including the development of social indicators. Twice during this period the Commission considered international surveys of programmes of social development, prepared especially for it. This review helped to establish a tradition in the Commission of considering national experience concerning social development programmes.

17. During the decade of the 1960s, the first United Nations Development Decade, the Commission continued to monitor global social conditions, identifying major obstacles to the attainment of social goals. Its focus also evolved to consider more complex issues of social development. It examined in a comprehensive manner the concept of an integrated or unified approach to economic and social planning, and extended the discussion to include consideration of the operational requirements of such an approach, particularly in the areas of planning and of information gathering, analysis and research. It also considered a number of issues of general importance to development, including land reform and income distribution.

18. During this period also, the Commission considered the relation of social development to other social phenomena, including urbanization and rural and urban regional development; the development of human resources; and social aspects of the process of industrialization. At the same time, the Commission continued to focus on long-standing issues, including social defence, family and child welfare, community development and various aspects of the provision of social services.

19. This period marked the beginning of the Commission's interest and involvement with the organization of major international events. At its seventeenth session, in 1966, the Commission considered proposals for an international Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare, which was eventually held in 1968 - the first such international gathering and, as such, a distant precursor of the World Summit for Social Development. At its eighteenth session, in 1967, the Commission began work on a draft declaration on social development, which would, in general terms, define the objectives of social development and the methods and means of achieving them. At its nineteenth session, in 1968, the Commission completed its draft of the document, which was eventually adopted in 1969 by the General Assembly as the Declaration on Social Progress and Development (Assembly resolution 2542 (XXIV)).

20. During the Second United Nations Development Decade (the 1970s), the Commission identified, as a main task, the promotion of more adequate attention to social development issues at the international level, and re-emphasized the importance of social components of development, as expressed in the series of international conferences held during this period on such issues as the human environment, population, food, women, human settlements, and trade and development. These activities were seen as contributions to securing a balance between the economic and social aspects of development, and relevant to promoting a unified approach to development planning.

21. As part of its consideration of a unified approach, the Commission during this period introduced an analysis of economic and social development, which included both the national and the international levels and which sought to ensure that no important sectors of the population would fall outside the scope of change and development. It was the focus on this "social groups approach" which helped development planning to move beyond a sectoral approach, and which remains a primary concern of the Commission to the present day, as reflected in the item of its agenda on monitoring of international plans and programmes of action. Topics examined during the 1970s included the social situation of children and their protection and welfare; the situation of youth; the integration of women in development; the rehabilitation of disabled persons and their position in development; the welfare of migrant workers and their families; and the outflow of trained personnel from developing to developed countries. The Commission adopted a Declaration on the Rights of the Mentally Retarded in 1971, and in 1973 it took up the issue of a convention on adoption law, which began a lengthy discussion and resulted in the introduction, in 1979, of a draft declaration on social and legal principles relating to adoption and foster placement of children nationally and internationally. A version of the declaration was eventually adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 41/85.

22. The Commission continued to monitor the world social situation, including a review and appraisal of the Second United Nations Development Decade, and began to consider national experience with the implementation of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development. At the same time, it carried forward its review of social development issues of a general nature, including national experience in achieving far-reaching social and economic changes for the purpose of social progress; land reform; rural development; social aspects of nutrition; the distribution of national income; social policy and social welfare; technical

cooperation activities for social development; social research and training capabilities of developing countries; and crime prevention and control.

23. Throughout the Third United Nations Development Decade (the 1980s), the Commission continued to advise the Council on social questions of a general character, primarily on the implications of adverse world economic conditions for social progress, and to survey recent and prospective trends and fundamental changes in the field of socio-economic development. A primary focus continued to be given to national experience in achieving far-reaching social and economic changes for the purpose of social progress. Specific attention was given to issues concerning the equitable distribution of national income, popular participation and the process of institutional development.

24. At each of its sessions, the Commission continued to consider the situation of particular social groups, and the decade included a number of major international years and events with which the Commission was directly involved. Among these were the International Year of Disabled Persons (1981); the World Assembly on Ageing (1982); the International Youth Year (1985); and the Interregional Consultation on Developmental Social Welfare Policies and Programmes (1987). Through its discussions of the situation of particular social groups, the Commission was an early promoter of the idea of "social integration", which encouraged a focus on the relationships among various social actors and groups and moved away from welfarist approaches to social development towards the concept of "a society for all", in which tolerance for diversity and respect for differences are encouraged and the particular contributions of all members of society are recognized. These concepts were taken up as one of the core issues of the World Summit for Social Development and were eventually incorporated into the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action.

2. Functions and methods of work of the Commission

25. At various times of its existence, the Commission has shown awareness of the need to improve its methods of work.

26. In its early years, the Commission stressed the importance of establishing close coordination with other functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council. The Commission considered the desirability of setting up joint committees of several commissions: for example, a recommendation was made to establish an ad hoc technical committee to consider the question of migration, composed of members of the Social and Population Commissions.

27. In 1966, in response to the request of the Council contained in its resolution 1086 (XXXIX), the Commission undertook a reappraisal of its role and function and set out a long-term programme of work for the remainder of the decade. The reappraisal formed the basis for the decision of the Council to revise the terms of reference of the Commission, to change its name to the Commission for Social Development, and to increase its membership to 32.

28. In setting out its long-term (five-year) programme of work, the Commission divided its main activities into categories under a number of headings, taking into account the interrelationships among the various sections: (a) social

policy and research; (b) social planning; (c) social reform and institutional change; (d) social questions relating to major sectors of development - health, education, employment, nutrition, housing; (e) mobilization and development of human resources; and (f) social welfare programmes for families, communities and special groups.

29. At its twenty-second session, in 1971, the Commission established a detailed work programme for the period 1971-1975. This work programme divided the Commission's activities into three main categories: (a) social policy and planning; (b) social reform and institutional change; and (c) human resources and popular participation in development. Within each category, a large number of activities were set out, and a work schedule was established for each of the activities for the years 1971-1973, followed by a list of projected activities for the years 1974 and 1975.

30. During its twenty-fourth session, in 1975, the Commission reviewed the progress achieved during 1973 and 1974 in implementing its work programme, and set out programme objectives for the medium-term plan for the period 1976-1979. The Commission was of the opinion that there tended to be, as reflected in the organization of work, a polarization of activity into developmental and planning concerns on the one hand, and welfare concerns on the other. It was generally agreed that the programme of work lacked an essential focus, and the Commission emphasized that social development should be viewed as a holistic process. Such a critical problem as the elimination of poverty should be considered in this perspective.

31. The Commission, at its twenty-fifth session, in 1977, recommended to the Economic and Social Council the adoption of a draft resolution on reinforcing the social development sector within the United Nations, in which, inter alia, the Council would recommend that the Secretary-General appoint a small working group composed of experts from States members of the Commission for Social Development to study and to make appropriate recommendations for improvement with regard to: (a) the operational effectiveness of social development activities within the United Nations; (b) the effectiveness of existing United Nations coordination machinery with respect to such activities; and (c) the future role of the social development component within the United Nations with a view to strengthening the social development input in the preparation of a new development strategy. The draft resolution was adopted by the Council on 13 May 1977 (resolution 2079 (LXII)).

32. The issue of reinforcing the social development sector within the United Nations, including the role of the Commission for Social Development in that regard, was the subject of intense discussion at the Commission's twenty-sixth session. In discussing the role of the Commission, several delegations pointed to its unique function in considering the human factor in totality in the process of development. It was noted that while there were specialized agencies to look into such specific areas as education, employment or health, it was the function of the Commission to examine the social phenomena resulting from the interaction of the consequences of changes in those sectors with other societal phenomena. The need for a change in emphasis, with greater attention to more recent broad currents of thought on international economic relations and social development, was pointed out. However, it was also pointed out that, in order

to be effective, the Commission would necessarily have to confine its attention at each session to a small number of well-defined subjects, in contrast to the current practice. The Commission could provide a useful service to Governments by promoting the exchange of experience in social development so that countries might benefit from knowledge of alternative methods.

33. The Commission requested the Economic and Social Council to appoint an ad hoc working group and to have it report to the Council on ways and means of strengthening the social development sector within the United Nations.

34. The Ad Hoc Working Group on the Social Aspects of the Development Activities of the United Nations was established by the Council, and its report was submitted to the Commission for Social Development at its twenty-seventh session, in 1981 (E/1981/3). During the Commission's discussion of its own role and function, the view was expressed that there was a strong need for one commission to deal with all aspects of social progress and development, particularly in the light of the centrifugal tendencies within the United Nations system. According to its mandate, as enlarged in 1966, that was the function of the Commission for Social Development. The Commission should strengthen its input to the programming of specific social aspects of development in biennial and medium-term plans, and it should play a more active role in presenting to the Council and to the General Assembly, in an analytical and synthesizing way, inputs from other United Nations programmes, regional commissions and specialized agencies related to selected social issues of concern to Member States.

E. Current methods of work

35. By the late 1980s, the Commission's agenda had become increasingly complex, leading to a call to improve the work of the Commission and streamline its agenda. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1986/14, requested the Commission, inter alia, to consider, at its thirtieth session, specific proposals concerning ways and means of improving the work of the Commission. At its thirtieth session, in 1987, the Commission established an informal open-ended working group to consider the question. The working group held nine meetings, during which it discussed extensively and in detail the ways in which the Commission's work had been undertaken, the problems, difficulties and deficiencies, and possible ways of improving the work so that objectives could be achieved with greater efficiency and the results could have a real effect on the social development of countries. There was general agreement that social problems were vast and complex and that the time available at each session to discuss them was limited. There was, therefore, a need to rationalize the work of the Commission and to give greater attention to the elaboration of clear and pragmatic conclusions.

36. The Commission then adopted resolution 30/2 on the improvement of the work of the Commission for Social Development. The resolution addressed major concerns about the functioning of the Commission, inter alia, in the areas of its agenda, its substantive output and the frequency and length of its meetings. The Commission was of the view that the adoption of the resolution was a step in the right direction and that its decisions concerning its work could be refined

and improved at a later date, as experience was gained in the application of the new approaches.

1. Agenda

37. The Commission, in resolution 30/2, expressed the view that the priority for improving the agenda was to provide it with a more selective focus. A selective focus could best be achieved by limiting in-depth discussion by the Commission to a few carefully chosen subjects of particular relevance and importance that could be discussed efficiently and that were not dealt with in depth by other specialized intergovernmental forums. The agenda would be structured around a general debate, a limited number of themes for in-depth consideration and an item on the monitoring of plans and activities. Beginning with its thirty-first session, in 1989, the Commission began to operate according to this major restructuring of its work, reducing its substantive agenda to the three items mentioned previously: (a) review of the world social situation; (b) monitoring of international plans and programmes of action; and (c) priority subject.

38. The first item is a general review of the world social situation based on the quadrennial reports on the world social situation and concise interim reports updating them. The purpose would be to provide a broad survey of social trends and issues and to identify emerging concerns, to permit an examination of the implementation of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development and to present significant national experience in broad aspects of social development. The presentation of national reports should stress new approaches and methods adopted at the national level for the solution of social problems. It was considered that the discussion on this item might lead to recommendations on social problems meriting government attention and international cooperation.

39. The second item includes the monitoring activities of the Commission with regard to international plans and programmes of action, the results of international conferences, the work of the United Nations in the social development field and the work of autonomous institutes. The purpose of the work on this item is to exchange experience and provide guidance on the implementation of activities.

40. The third item comprises a few carefully chosen subjects, centring on significant issues of social development of common interest in all their aspects and emphasizing the policy measures that could be taken to deal with the problems, taking into account the special concerns of the developing countries. The purpose of the discussion is to lead to concrete recommendations by the Commission, as a specialized body, on how the issues could best be addressed by the international community. The issues selected are those whose immediate importance are recognized and should be relevant to the progress of social development in developing countries. They should be selected taking into account the subjects included in the Declaration on Social Progress and Development that were not dealt with in depth by other intergovernmental bodies.

41. Themes should be selected sufficiently in advance to permit the Secretariat to undertake the necessary research and analysis, including obtaining

information from Governments on national experience. Accordingly, themes for the sessions of the Commission during the period of each medium-term plan should, where possible, be identified in advance.

2. Inter-sessional expert groups

42. In resolution 30/2, the Commission suggested that, in preparing for the discussion of specific issues, use could be made of governmental and non-governmental expert advice in formulating possible recommendations. That advice could be obtained through the organization of ad hoc expert group meetings, which had customarily been used in implementing the social development programme, and linking them more closely to the agenda of the Commission. It was considered that Governments might offer to host particular expert meetings during inter-sessional periods, for the purpose of discussing issues connected to the themes selected for in-depth consideration at the next session of the Commission.

43. Between 1990 and 1992, three expert group meetings were organized in order to facilitate the preparation of discussions at the thirty-second and thirty-third sessions of the Commission. At its thirty-first session, in 1989, after extensive discussions, the Commission selected two priority subjects for consideration at its thirty-second session: the problem of the integration of young people into society; and the social impact of the critical economic environment on developing countries: strategies for social development cooperation.

44. In order to prepare for the in-depth consideration of these two priority subjects, two inter-sessional expert meetings were held. The Government of Spain hosted the International Symposium on the Integration of Young People into Society at Toledo, from 4 to 8 June 1990, while the Government of Finland hosted the Meeting of the Expert Group on the Social Impact of the Critical Economic Environment on Developing Countries: Strategies for Social Development Cooperation, at Järvenpää, from 17 to 21 September 1990. The reports of both these meetings were made available to the Commission at its thirty-second session, in 1991.

45. At its thirty-second session, the Commission decided to consider one priority subject at its thirty-third session: the social consequences of population growth and changing social conditions with particular emphasis on the family. An expert group meeting on the subject was held at Vienna from 21 to 25 September 1992 in order to prepare a report for consideration by the Commission at its thirty-third session, in 1993.

46. It should also be noted that, at the thirty-third session, in connection with the Commission's contribution to the preparations for the World Summit for Social Development, two Governments offered to host expert group meetings on subjects related to the core issues of the Summit. The Government of the Netherlands hosted the Expert Group on Social Integration, held at The Hague from 27 September to 1 October 1993, and the Government of Sweden hosted the Expert Group on Enhancing Productive Employment, held at Saltsjöbaden from 4 to 8 October 1993. The reports of both meetings were transmitted directly to the

Preparatory Committee for the Summit at its first substantive session, in February 1994.

3. In-session working groups

47. During recent sessions, the Commission has embraced the practice of establishing in-session working groups on individual agenda items of particular interest. This practice has been considered as one that encourages the preparation of concise conclusions and recommendations obtained by consensus. The results and conclusions of each working group are reported to the Commission in plenary meeting for approval, generally in the form of a chairman's text. At its most recent session (the thirty-fourth, in 1995), three in-session working groups were established: on the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, on youth, and on the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

4. Documentation

48. To complement the streamlining of the Commission's agenda, the Secretariat has achieved an overall reduction in both the number and the length of reports submitted for consideration. For example, at its twenty-ninth session, in 1985, the Commission had before it 23 pre-session documents and two conference room papers; by the thirty-fourth session, in 1995, the number of pre-session documents had been reduced to 12 and there were no conference room papers. The reduction in the number of documents derives partly from the streamlining of the agenda, which has reduced the number of issues currently before the Commission. It also results from the decision by the Commission to reduce the number of reports it receives, together with a decision by the Secretariat to combine several documents into one omnibus report.

49. Most of the reports received by the Commission are prepared to enable the Commission to properly consider the items on its agenda. Several of the reports before the Commission at any one session are reports that are mandated by decisions of either the Economic and Social Council or the General Assembly.

5. Reporting and guidance provided by the Commission

50. In resolution 30/2, the Commission also considered its substantive outputs. It was considered important for the Commission to rationalize the results of its sessions by making its conclusions and recommendations more precise and comprehensive. The fundamental task of the Commission is to provide advice to the Economic and Social Council and, in accordance with the rules of procedure, such advice could be embodied in resolutions adopted by the Commission on matters within its competence or else in draft resolutions recommended for adoption by the Council.

51. For those subjects within the competence of the Commission, the preferred method of providing advice is in the form of a Commission resolution. Those resolutions generally consist of texts that express the Commission's analysis of

a situation and set out its policy recommendations, including their rationale, which are presented in an annex. These texts are considered as guidance provided by the Commission in its role as a functional body of the Council.

52. For those subjects on which action by the Council is required, the Commission generally prepares draft resolutions for adoption by the Council. Such subjects often include those problems or policies whose nature and priority are such that they merit further discussion at the level of the Council, or input from other functional commissions.

6. Role of the Secretariat

53. The Secretariat provides substantive support to the Commission in the form of preparation of documentation, organization and substantive servicing of expert group meetings convened to prepare priority subjects for consideration by the Commission, and substantive support for inter-sessional or in-session ad hoc working groups. The Secretariat also provides technical support before, during and after the sessions of the Commission. As needed, the Secretariat provides regular liaison between the Commission and other functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, and deals with inquiries and correspondence addressed to the Chairman when the Commission is not in session. These functions assumed special importance when the Commission held its meetings at Vienna and, for various practical reasons, there was no tradition of convening meetings of the Bureau between biennial sessions of the Commission.